



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on the Elections in Uzbekistan

As delivered by Ambassador Julie Finley
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
January 17, 2008

Mr. Chairman,

The United States is interested in the conduct of the Uzbek presidential election on December 23rd, which, according to ODIHR, fell short of meeting international standards.

The United States notes Uzbekistan's inclusion of a number of domestic and international election monitoring teams. ODIHR was invited to field an observation mission, which is an important commitment of OSCE States. However, we would have been more encouraged if Uzbekistan had adhered to its initial unconditional invitation for an observation mission. The late issuance of visas for the needs assessment mission and the restrictions placed on the number of observers appears to have hindered ODIHR's ability to conduct a systematic observation on election day. All OSCE States have made commitments to each other regarding election observation missions, including permitting an enhanced role for ODIHR to observe the elections process before, during, and after election day. We look forward to ODIHR's final report.

We share the concerns outlined in ODIHR's initial findings, as expressed in its December 24th statement, which presented a credible judgment that the election fundamentally did not advance opportunities for genuine debate or empower civil society. Tight media controls and onerous registration requirements ensured that there were no true opposition candidates.

It is nonetheless clear that President Karimov will remain in office, and we in the OSCE should now turn our attention to what happens in Uzbekistan following the elections. Those who are genuinely interested in supporting the advance of political reform and human rights in Uzbekistan should now redouble their efforts to pursue these objectives. We would like to engage the Uzbek authorities on a number of programs beneficial to Uzbekistan and the region. Specifically, the Government of Uzbekistan must take concrete, verifiable steps to halt the use of torture against detainees, secure the release of prisoners of conscience, and allow for non-governmental organizations and the media to operate more freely.

Mr. Chairman, we count on the Uzbek authorities to take such steps on these issues, and believe the OSCE can play an important role in advancing this endeavor. The United States stands ready to support the government of Uzbekistan in its efforts.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.